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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000248

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [FR](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: ELYSEE MIDDLE EAST ADVISOR ON UNIFIL RENEWAL,  
LEBANON-SYRIA DEVELOPMENTS, HIZBALLAH

REF: A. PARIS 208

[B](#). STATE 4247

[C](#). BEIRUT 98

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: The Elysee appears solidly behind the MFA in opposing a preambular reference to UNSCR 1559 in the UNIFIL renewal resolution, though it suggests greater flexibility than the MFA on asking DPKO to review UNIFIL's force structure (ref b). During a January 12 meeting, Presidential Middle East advisor Andre Parant repeated serious concerns expressed to us by the MFA (ref a) that a preambular reference to UNSCR 1559 would serve Syrian arguments and undermine both UNIFIL and prospects for 1559 implementation. Although Parant clarified that the GoF had not made a "definitive decision" to reject the preambular reference, we viewed this comment as an attempt to be diplomatic, not a sign of greater flexibility. Parant conceded that there could be value in signaling to Syria and Lebanon that UNIFIL's presence was not open-ended, and he did not repeat concerns expressed by the MFA (ref a) on the dangers of reducing UNIFIL's size. Parant suggested that the January 9 Blue Line clashes launched by Hizballah toughened GoF resolve to see the GoL extend its authority in the South, but will not affect the GoF position on EU designation of Hizballah. On Lebanon/Syria developments, Parant dismissed Syria's purported transfer of the Lebanon file to Walid Muallim as window-dressing, though he cited the marginalization of FM Shara as a side benefit. Parant added that former PM Hariri had briefed the GoF on his recent lunch with the SMI Chief in Lebanon (ref c), and the GoF was not afraid that Hariri would cut a deal with the Damascus. At the same time, the Elysee had advised Hariri to be more forthright in aligning with the opposition and urged opposition elements to develop a long-term strategy for cooperation beyond the electoral law. In this context, Maronite Patriarch Sfeir will visit Paris to meet with Chirac in late January. Parant described the U.S. and French Ambassadors in Beirut as a formidable team and concluded that U.S. and French efforts on 1559 implementation were having a positive effect, both in widening maneuvering room for the Lebanese opposition and pressuring the SARG and GOL, which were in increasing disarray. End summary and comment.

PREAMBULAR REFERENCE, EXAMINING FORCE STRUCTURE

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff reviewed ref (b) talking points on U.S. views on UNIFIL renewal with Presidential Advisor on the Middle East Andre Parant late January 12. On including a preambular reference to 1559 in the UNIFIL renewal text, Parant repeated concerns expressed to us by MFA officials earlier this week (ref a), though in a less categorical, more diplomatic fashion. First stressing the GoF's desire to continue to work "hand in hand" with the U.S. on this issue, Parant said the GoF had not taken a "definitive decision" on the preambular reference and was willing to discuss this further in New York. Parant stressed, nevertheless that GoF saw serious "dangers" in including the preambular 1559 reference, which would break the "line of separation" which the GoF had sought to maintain between 1559 and the peace process, and in turn serve Syrian arguments that it would remain in Lebanon until a comprehensive peace was achieved. The 1559 reference could also potentially undermine confidence in UNIFIL, which, as a Chapter 6 operation, required the consent of the Lebanese government (and others) to remain in place. Repeating points made by the MFA (ref a), Parant expressed a strong preference for indirect references to 1559 in the UNIFIL renewal, by toughening language on Lebanon's territorial integrity and independence and restoring full control in the South. He cautioned, though, that seeking to shift UNIFIL's mandate towards supporting 1559's call for dismantling of militias was "not realistic," as UNIFIL remained a Chapter 6 operation. Parant summed up his view that we would resolve the 1559 reference issue quickly in New York, and added that the French Embassy in Washington had surmised that the State Department was more adamant on the 1559 reference than the NSC. He quipped that one could hear similarly differing messages, at times, between the MFA and Elysee on Lebanon. Poloff expressed hope we would reach agreement quickly, but stressed that the points we presented fully represented USG views.

13. (C) Parant suggested that the GoF, while cautious on any possible changes to UNIFIL's mandate, might be willing to accept the U.S. proposal to ask DPKO to examine UNIFIL's force structure and report back at a later date. Without reviving the arguments made to us by the MFA on the need to preserve, vice reduce, UNIFIL's size, Parant conceded that there could be value in signaling to the GOL and SARG that UNIFIL's presence was not to be taken for granted. Although Parant did not fully endorse this U.S. proposal, he speculated that the GoF would be "ready to follow" the U.S. on this point.

14. (C) Asked what impact the January 9 Blue Line clashes initiated by Hizballah would have on the UNIFIL renewal and GoF views on Hizballah, Parant stressed that the incident only reinforced GoF convictions on 1559 implementation and the need for the GOL to extend its authority throughout the South. On the other hand, Parant stressed that there was no change in the GoF reservations on EU terrorist designation of Hizballah, which he said would result in the EU losing all leverage it might have on Hizballah. At the same time, Parant sought to stress that the GoF analysis of Hizballah was not so far from that of the U.S., and that, typically, we differed on means not objectives. (Comment: Other MFA officials have responded in a similar negative fashion, when asked recently whether the changed circumstances of UNSCR 1559 and the GoF crackdown on Al-Manar could presage a shift on Hizballah designation. End comment.)

DISMISSIVE OF SARG, BUT CONFIDENT IN HARIRI

15. (C) Turning to Lebanon-Syria developments, Parant dismissed the Syrian elevation of Walid Muallim to Vice Minister and the purported transfer of the Lebanon file from SMI to the Syrian MFA as so much "window-dressing." Parant stressed that the GoF remained "totally skeptical" of this and other superficial SARG gestures, such as a possible new redeployment, which did not suggest any fundamental change in the Syrian approach in Lebanon. While the GoF had no illusions on the significance of Muallim's promotion, one useful side-benefit was the public perception that that Muallim's elevation was a disavowal of FM Shara, which was largely how Arab governments were interpreting the SARG decision.

16. (C) On former PM Hariri's recent lunch with Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) chief in Lebanon Rustom Ghazale (ref c), Parant noted that Hariri had briefed the GoF on the discussion, which took place in a new dynamic, not the least since Ghazale had to go see Hariri and not the other way around. Hariri had told the GoF that he had a frank discussion with Ghazale and assured the SMI chief that while UNSCR 1559 was not "anti-Syrian," the old framework for Syrian-Lebanese relations was no longer acceptable. Syria needed to change, and there could be no more Syrian tutelage of Lebanon. Parant said Ghazale reportedly responded by stressing to Hariri that Damascus was aware of this situation and thinking of ways for its Lebanon policy to evolve, citing the Muallim decision.

17. (C) Parant noted that former PM Hariri was a more frequent visitor to the Elysee, ever since he left government. The GoF did not view Hariri as trying to "cut a deal" with the Syrians, and saw Hariri as very sincere in trying to "stay above the melee" and proceed carefully, without totally associating himself with the opposition. The GoF had advised Hariri, nevertheless, to do more to reinforce and associate himself with the opposition, and to clarify ambiguity on where he stood. On the possible structuring of electoral districts, Parant speculated that the opposition would achieve unity on the issue, as Hariri had shown willingness to accept the smaller "kaza" districts which were not advantageous to him electorally. Nevertheless, the GoF had urged the Lebanese opposition to develop a long-term governance strategy beyond a temporary alliance on the electoral law, to plan for the expected arrival of a new government after spring elections -- of which Hariri was the only credible choice as PM. To shore up French support for the opposition and keep pressure on the SARG and GOL, President Chirac planned to welcome Maronite Patriarch Sfeir to Paris in late January, following on Chirac's meeting with Walid Jumblatt last December.

NEXT STEPS

18. (C) Looking beyond the UNIFIL renewal, Parant stressed that the GoF's overriding preoccupation remained Lebanon's spring elections and the need to remain vigilant on the electoral law. The GoF hoped to see UN Envoy on UNSCR 1559 Terje Roed-Larsen in the region soon, and looked to the April SYG report to deliver an important message on the electoral law and the need for non-interference in elections prior to their taking place. Parant commended Deputy Secretary Armitage's January 2 visit to Damascus and Ambassador Feltman's subsequent public remarks in Beirut which

effectively quashed Syrian attempts to distort the U.S. position on Lebanon. Parant described the U.S. and French ambassadors in Beirut as a formidable team, and assessed that U.S and French efforts were having a positive effect, by giving the Lebanese opposition more maneuvering room and keeping the pressure on the GOL and SARG, which were in increasing disarray on the issue. The GoF was seeking greater EU support in calling for 1559 implementation, and found no opposition, but not a great deal of enthusiasm among other capitals. At the same time, Parant cautioned that we all needed to be careful in "measuring" pressure on the SARG, so as not to provoke a brutal reaction, of which Lebanon would be the first victim.

#### BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

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19. (SBU) Parant, who has concentrated on the Near East and Africa throughout his career, has been nominated as French Ambassador to Senegal; his last day in his current position as Technical Advisor for Middle East/Americas will be January 21, before arriving in Dakar by February 25 (after the Chirac state visit to Senegal in early February.) Septel will report detailed biographic information on Parant and his replacement, Dominique Boche (most recently MFA Special Advisor on Religious Affairs), who takes up his functions January 21.  
Leach